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**Items for information: population and housing censuses**

# Population and housing censuses

## Report of the Secretary-General

*Summary*

The present report is submitted to the Statistical Commission in accordance with a request of the Commission at its thirty-eighth session.[a] It presents activities completed in respect of the implementation of the 2010 World Programme on Population and Housing Censuses in general, including the conduct of expert group meetings and training workshops; finalization of the *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses, Rev. 2*; and the development of a website to serve as a census knowledge base. It also contains future activities related to the 2010 World Programme. The Commission is requested to take note of the report.

[a] See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2007, Supplement No. 4* (E/2007/24), chap. I.A.

* E/CN.3/2008/1.

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# I. Introduction

1. At its thirty-eighth session,[1] the Statistical Commission urged the United Nations Statistics Division and other international agencies to increase their technical assistance to national statistical offices in order to strengthen national capacity for the implementation of the 2010 World Programme on Population and Housing Censuses. In addition, the Commission requested the expeditious release of the revised *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses*.

# II. Activities of the 2010 World Programme on Population and Housing Censuses

2. Following the approval by the Statistical Commission of the second revision of the *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses*, the Division undertook activities that were aimed at advancing the implementation of the 2010 World Programme, including finalizing the revision; conducting three expert group meetings and five training workshops; and developing a website to serve as a census knowledge base.

## A. Second revision of the *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses*

3. The second revision of the *Principles and Recommendations* was approved by the Statistical Commission at its thirty-eighth session, in February 2007. The document has been finalized and submitted for publication and translation. The online version is available on the Division website at http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/sources/census/census3.htm.

## B. Expert group meetings

4. The following three expert group meetings were held in response to requests from countries for guidance in planning and conducting their 2010 round of censuses:

(a) The first expert group meeting was held in New York from 29 May to 1 June 2007. The meeting was on contemporary practices in census mapping and the use of geographic information systems. The expert group reviewed the conceptual framework and different approaches to census mapping and the capabilities offered by geospatial technologies to support census mapping; reviewed geocoding concepts and approaches with respect to data collection; assessed the use of global positioning systems and other geospatial technologies for digital delineation of enumeration areas and data collection; reviewed the development of geographic databases, spatial analysis and data dissemination; and identified and discussed organizational and institutional issues associated with census cartography. In

[1] See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2007, Supplement No. 4* (E/2007/24), chap. I.A.

addition, the group provided suggestions with respect to the revision and update of the *Handbook on Geographic Information Systems and Digital Mapping*;[2]

(b) The second expert group meeting was held in New York from 24 to 28 September 2007 to review a draft handbook on measuring international migration in censuses and surveys. The group made recommendations on the practical application of international guidelines related to measuring international migration. The recommendations are being taken into account in finalizing the handbook, which is expected to be released during the second quarter of 2008;

(c) The third expert group meeting, which was held in New York from 5 to 9 November 2007, was conducted by the Division in collaboration with the Bureau of Statistics of the International Labour Organization. The group reviewed a draft handbook on measuring economically active population in censuses. The suggestions and recommendations of the expert group have been taken into account in finalizing the handbook, which is expected to be released during the first quarter of 2008.

## C. Training workshops

5. Five workshops were conducted in 2007 by the Division, in collaboration with the relevant regional commissions and subregional organizations. The four workshops on census management and cartography were held in:

(a) Lusaka, from 8 to 12 October 2007, for the anglophone African countries;

(b) Rabat, from 12 to 16 November 2007, for the francophone African countries;

(c) Bangkok, from 15 to 19 October 2007, for the Asian countries;

(d) Port-of-Spain, from 22 to 26 October 2007, for the Caribbean countries.

6. The purpose of the four workshops was to emphasize the importance of good census management and to highlight the evolving capabilities of geographic information systems and other geospatial technologies that could be used in censuses. The workshops covered such census activities as delineation of enumeration areas; data collection; and analysis and dissemination of census information.

7. Other topics covered by the workshops included international guidelines for census-taking to enhance quality; use of contemporary technologies for census geography; and the role of censuses in disaster management.

8. The fifth workshop, held from 3 to 6 December 2007 in Cairo for countries of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, focused on the complementary use of census results and vital statistics in producing population estimates. In addition, it introduced or reiterated to the participants the international standards for civil registration and vital statistics, as a necessary continuation of the foundation laid by population and housing censuses.

[2] *Studies in Methods, No. 79* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.00.XVII.12).

### D. 2010 World Population and Housing Census Programme website

9. The Division has developed a website as part of its activities for the 2010 World Population and Housing Census Programme: http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/sources/census/2010_PHC/default.htm. The primary objective of the website is to promote international exchange and sharing of census-related knowledge and information and to monitor progress being made in the implementation of the Programme at the national, regional and international levels. The website provides updated information on country activities related to census-taking in the 2010 census round, including national census dates and questionnaires that have been used in various censuses. In addition, the website provides information on census meetings and workshops organized by the Division and other organizations of the United Nations system.

10. One of the important aspects of the website is the census knowledge base it provides, which serves as a repository of census methodology and documents pertaining to country best practices in census-taking. The main objective of the knowledge base is therefore to act as a resource centre for use by countries as they conduct their population and housing censuses. To date, the knowledge base contains over 200 articles on activities related to census-taking. The Division will soon add an online technical publication on guidelines for documenting census operations and activities.

11. In addition to working with the regional commissions, the Division continued to work closely with such international agencies as the World Bank and the United Nations Population Fund. For example, as a follow-up to the Marrakech Plan for Statistics, the World Bank provided financial support for the implementation of the 2010 World Programme. Collaboration with the United Nations Population Fund focused on advocacy activities, including having resource persons participate in workshops on advocacy.

## III. Future activities

12. A range of census-related activities are envisaged in 2008, including those listed below:

**Monitoring country activities related to censuses**

13. In 2008, as part of the activities related to the 2010 World Programme, the Division will continue to monitor the progress of countries in conducting their population and housing censuses. The major goal of the 2010 World Programme is to ensure that all countries and areas conduct a population and housing census at least once in the decade 2005-2014. Consequently, the primary function of monitoring national census activities is to set up an alert system to identify the status of census-taking in various countries. Identifying the difficulties that countries may face in implementing the 2010 World Programme will help to ensure proper and timely support during the different phases of census preparation and conduct. The findings will be brought to the attention of the international community in an attempt to generate support and attract donors.

**Technical guidelines and handbooks**

14. The Division will continue to develop guidelines and technical materials pertaining to the different census phases. Work will continue in the preparation of reference and training materials on topics critical to the 2010 World Programme. The strategy is to focus each year on successive stages of the census process, thereby enabling the Division to update and/or develop guidelines and best practices in a rational way. Materials used in workshops will be refined and adapted to online training materials for use by a wider audience. In this connection, beginning in 2008, material on census management, mapping and geographic information systems will be posted online.

**Training workshops**

15. In 2008, the Division will focus on training workshops covering data collection, quality assurance, data capture and editing. The workshops will also cover the use of handheld devices in data collection, optical data capture and editing. In addition, the workshops will cover modules of such special topics as engendering censuses and measuring disability through censuses.

**Documenting alternative methodologies and preconditions for their adoption and portability**

16. Traditional/conventional censuses are still the most popular methodologies for many countries; however, some countries are adopting or planning new approaches in census-taking, including the rolling census, the virtual census, the register-based census and the re-engineered census. The Division will monitor these new developments and methodologies for elaboration and dissemination on the Division's website. Emphasis will be placed on discussing the preconditions necessary for such methodologies to yield reliable data and the prospects for portability to other countries.

**Maintenance of the resource centre on the Internet**

17. The information on activities posted on the website will be continuously updated in 2008 and additional documents will be added to the knowledge base. It is hoped that there will be active participation of member countries in using the available documents to provide information for inclusion on the website.

**Technical assistance**

18. Technical assistance missions will be undertaken to provide country-specific support. The aim of the missions will be to strengthen the capacity of countries in implementing censuses.

**Development of a software package for census information dissemination**

19. Work on the development of a software package, CensusInfo, will be initiated in 2008 in collaboration with DevInfo to assist countries in disseminating census results on the website and CD-ROM. Based on the DevInfo platform, unique functionalities will be added to meet the census dissemination requirements, such as cross tabulations, template reports for dissemination and mapping geographic information systems facilities.

20. Recognizing that international, regional, subregional and national organizations and other entities are stakeholders in the 2010 World Programme, the Division will continue to enhance the communication networks needed to support the Programme. In the meantime, the Division has developed a mechanism to monitor the ability of countries to provide funding for their censuses and such information will be made available to prospective donors.

21. The World Bank's support for the 2010 World Programme on Population and Housing Censuses has been instrumental to achieving the goals related to the above-mentioned activities in 2007. The importance of ensuring that this support is continued throughout the duration of the 2010 round of censuses cannot be overemphasized, especially when taking into consideration the host of continuing activities related to the Programme.

22. The Commission may wish to take note of the present report.